

What is the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program?

The USDA Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program (FRPP) helps Massachusetts farmers keep their productive land in agriculture in perpetuity by providing matching funds to help purchase development rights or easements. FRPP easements protect entire working farms, woodlands, wetlands, important natural areas, and historical and cultural resources.

Nationally, the FRPP program partners with states, tribes, local governments and non-profit organizations to purchase conservation easements for the purpose of protecting topsoil by limiting non-agricultural uses of the land.

In Massachusetts, FRPP funds are administered through the Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources' (MDAR) Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) Program.

How does FRPP work in Massachusetts?

Through a cooperative agreement with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, NRCS provides federal FRPP funds to complement state APR funds, with which MDAR acquires and manages easements on farmland to protect it from non-agricultural development. NRCS provides up to 50 percent of the fair market value of an easement.

Under the APR program, the state purchases from a farmer, a restriction on his or her agricultural property. The APR value is the difference between the land's agricultural value and its fair market value.

Landowners participate voluntarily and protected farms remain in private ownership. The farmer still owns the land and retains the right to sell it, lease it, or will it to his or her heirs. The farm must remain in agriculture in perpetuity, however, even if sold or passed on to someone else.



What land is eligible?

To qualify for FRPP, farmland must be part of a pending offer from a state or local farmland protection program; be privately owned; and meet other criteria such as soil classification, size and location.

The commonwealth's APR program has additional criteria. See www.mass.gov/agr/landuse/APR/criteria.htm or contact MDAR for details.

How much farmland has been protected in Massachusetts?

From the beginning of the FRPP program in 1996 through 2004, \$12.3 million in FRPP funds have been awarded to purchase easements on approximately 6,335 acres of valuable agricultural land on 85 farms in Massachusetts. Nationally, more than 277,811 acres of farm and ranch land have been protected in 43 states.

Massachusetts' FRPP allocations for FY2005 and FY2006 were \$4.6 million and \$3.67 million, respectively. An estimated 3,000 additional acres of farmland will be protected with these recent funds.

Due to increasing development pressure statewide, requests for FRPP funds have increased dramatically in recent years, far outpacing the program's funding capacity. Requests in Massachusetts alone often represent nearly 20 percent of the total amount of FRPP funds available nationwide.

Since the APR program's inception in 1977, Massachusetts state government has invested over \$126 million to protect more than 500 agricultural properties totaling more than 51,000 acres.



Why protect Massachusetts farmland?

Massachusetts has 6,100 farms and 520,000 acres of farmland. That farmland benefits all Bay State citizens by providing open space, scenic vistas, fresh farm products, recreational and tourism opportunities, and wildlife habitat.

The Bay State has some of the best agricultural land in the United States. The Connecticut River Valley's fertile soil produces top quality fruits and vegetables. Worcester County, home to apple orchards and dairy farms, ranks fourth among the nation's 3,066 counties for sales of farm products sold to directly to consumers at farmstands farmers' markets and pick-your-own operations.

Preserving land for agriculture in Massachusetts is not easy. Development pressures are increasing in the area at a rapid rate. Between 1992 and 1997, Massachusetts lost six percent of its farmland – or 27,200 acres – to developed uses, ranking second in the nation for the percentage of farmland lost. At \$9,300 an acre, Massachusetts ranks fourth nationally for farmland value.

The FRPP helps bolster the Commonwealth's \$417 million agricultural industry by keeping farms in active agriculture and by sending a strong message that the state and federal governments are serious about encouraging a viable agricultural economy.



How do I apply?

FRPP funds are administered through the state APR program. If you are interested in permanently protecting your farmland under a state Agricultural Preservation Restriction, contact:

Ron Hall
APR Program Coordinator
Massachusetts Department of Agricultural Resources
617-626-1704
Ronald.Hall@state.ma.us
www.mass.gov/agr/landuse/APR

For details on the federal FRPP program, contact:

Richard DeVergilio
Massachusetts FRPP Manager
USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
413-253-4379
rick.devergilio@ma.usda.gov
www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/frpp.html

The Natural Resources Conservation Service provides leadership in a partnership effort to help America's private land owners and managers conserve their soil, water, and other natural resources.

For more information on NRCS in Massachusetts visit:

www.ma.nrcs.usda.gov

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United States Department of Agriculture
Natural Resources Conservation Service

Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program

in Massachusetts



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